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SCOOPED LACROSSE HEAD

The present invention relates to lacrosse sticks, and more particularly to a lacrosse stick head having a curved or scooped configuration and other improvements that facilitate play.

~~CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS~~

~~This application claims priority to Applicants co-pending patent application, Serial No. 038,327, which was filed on May 3, 1995 and entitled "LACROSSE HEAD."~~

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Lacrosse heads of current design typically take the form of an open frame having a base with a concave interior surface that defines a ball rest, a pair of sidewalls that diverge from the base, and a lip that interconnects the sidewalls remotely of the base. Openings or other means are carried by the frame for securing a lacrosse net around the back side of the frame, leaving the opposing front side of the frame open for receiving lacrosse balls. A socket or other means exteriorly projects from the base of the frame for attachment to a handle. The handle and attachment socket define a handle/head axis, which typically although not necessarily forms the central axis and/or an axis of lateral symmetry of the head. All or at least a major portion of the front side of the head is conventionally disposed in a plane parallel to the handle/head axis.

Although lacrosse heads of the described character have enjoyed substantial acceptance and success in the marketplace, improvements remain desirable. It is a general object of the present invention to provide a lacrosse head of the described character that possesses a radically new curved scoop-like design that greatly facilitates play and gives players a decided advantage as compared with heads of conventional construction. Another and more specific object of the present invention is to provide a lacrosse head of the described character that is particularly designed and configured to enable players to dominate ground balls. A further object of the present invention is to provide a lacrosse head of the described character that is specifically designed to direct a lacrosse ball to the pocket or "sweet spot" of the head, and to improve player control during one-handed cradling of the ball at the ball rest. Another object of the present invention is to provide a lacrosse head that improves both player "feel" and ball velocity during cradling, passing or shooting. Yet another object of the present invention is to provide a lacrosse head that incorporates one or more of the aforementioned objectives and advantages while at the same time being entirely within NCAA and other applicable regulations and specifications.

A lacrosse head in accordance with a first aspect or feature of the present invention comprises an open frame construction of the general character described above in which the front side of the frame at the base, adjacent to the socket or other means for attachment to the handle, defines a base plane parallel to the head/handle axis. However, contrary to conventional designs, neither the front sides nor the back sides of the frame sidewalls lie in or are parallel to such base plane. Rather, both the front sides and the back sides of the frame sidewalls curve away from the base plane in the direction of the frame back side from the base toward the lip, and then back toward the base plane so as to impart a curved scoop-like geometry to the head when viewed in side elevation. In the preferred embodiment of the invention, both the front side and the back side of the head have maximum spacing or distance from the base plane at about the midpoint of the sidewalls between the base and the lip.

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Both the front sides and the back sides of the frame sidewalls curve at substantially constant radii throughout at least one-half of their lengths, and preferably throughout about three-quarters of their lengths, between the base and the lip. Curvature of the sidewalls and lengths of the sidewalls are such that the back sides of the sidewalls return at the lip to a spacing or distance from the base plane equal to or less than spacing of such back side from the plane adjacent to the base. The sidewalls of the lacrosse head in the preferred embodiment of the invention have a substantially constant thickness, measured in a direction perpendicular to the base plane, throughout at least one-half of their lengths, and preferably throughout at least about three-quarters of their lengths, between the base and the lip.

The scooped lacrosse head embodying this first feature or aspect of the invention possesses numerous advantages over conventional head constructions in which the front side of the frame is disposed essentially or entirely in a plane. The curved sidewalls of the present invention naturally channel the lacrosse ball into the "sweet spot" or pocket of the net. Further, the net pocket may be of deeper construction than with conventional heads, while maintaining a sidewall thickness of no more than two inches as required by applicable NCAA specifications. Moreover, the arched scoop-like construction of the head, and the consequent scoop construction of the net attached to the head, provides a greater distance for the ball to travel in the net during a throwing motion, thereby improving both ball speed and "feel," again while maintaining an overall head length within applicable NCAA specifications.

In accordance with another important feature of the present invention, which may be employed either separately from or more preferably in combination with other aspects of the invention, the lip that interconnects the head sidewalls remotely of the frame base has an exterior surface—i.e., a surface remote from the ball stop at the frame base—that defines a ground contact plane—i.e., a plane of contact with the ground (assuming that the ground is flat) at the centerline of the head—at an angle of at least 40° to the head/handle axis. That is, when the forward outside surface of the lip is held flat against the ground to scoop a ball, the handle is at an angle of at least 40° to the ground. This exterior lip surface angle, particularly when combined with the preferred scoop-like configuration of the head as discussed above, greatly facilitates control of ground balls because the stick and head may be held at a natural angle for retrieving ground balls while the front lip is scooped beneath the ball without interrupting play or player motion. Further, the geometry of the head, coupled with the preferred molded nylon construction of the head, allows the head to flex so as to improve contact between the lip and ground during use, yielding even greater ground contact and ground ball dominance.

In accordance with a third important aspect of the present invention, which again may be implemented either separately from or more preferably in combination with other aspects of the invention, the base of the frame that defines the ball rest has a concave shoulder at the back side of the base that is recessed with respect to the concave interior surface of the base, with the net-securing apertures or other means at the base being disposed in such shoulder. This shoulder provides two distinct advantages over conventional ball rest constructions. First, the knots or other means that secure the net to the frame are recessed by the shoulder beneath the ball rest, and beneath the foam rubber ball stop that is conventionally secured to the ball rest. Thus, the net-securing knots at the frame base are not abraded by balls that abut or are carried on the ball rest and ball stop. Second, the recessed shoulder allows the ball to rest within the net

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pocket at a position below the arcuate plane of the ball rest when the head is held perpendicular to the ground. This feature provides improved ball control for one-handed cradling, while remaining within applicable NCAA regulations which require that the ball fall freely from the head when the head is held in inverted horizontal orientation. In the preferred embodiment of the invention, the arcuate ball-rest surface is on a conical surface of revolution at an angle of 91° to the head/handle axis, which further enhances the natural action of the head to hold the ball against the net during one-handed vertical cradling.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention, together with additional objects, features and advantages thereof, will be best understood from the following description, the appended claims and the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a top plan view of a lacrosse stick incorporating an improved head in accordance with a presently preferred embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 2 is a side elevational view of the lacrosse stick illustrated in FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is an end elevational view of the lacrosse stick illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 2;

FIG. 4 is a plan view of a lacrosse head in accordance with a presently preferred embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 5 is a side elevational view of the lacrosse head illustrated in FIG. 4;

FIG. 6 is a sectional view the lacrosse head taken substantially along the line 6—6 in FIG. 4;

FIG. 7 is a fragmentary sectional view taken substantially along the line 7—7 in FIG. 1;

FIGS. 8 and 9 are schematic views similar to that of FIG. 7 that illustrate one feature of the present invention; and

FIG. 10 is a fragmentary view on an enlarged scale of a portion of the head as illustrated in FIG. 6.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIGS. 1-3 illustrate a lacrosse stick 20 that includes a head 22 in accordance with a presently preferred embodiment of the present invention having a net or pocket 24 secured thereto. The head and net subassembly is in turn secured to a handle 26, which is preferably of hollow titanium construction having a cross section in the form of an irregular octagon. Net 24 may be of any suitable type, such as that disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. D318,509.

Head 22 (FIGS. 1-6) preferably comprises an open one-piece frame of monolithic injection-molded plastic composition such as nylon. Nylon 6 6 is currently preferred. Head frame 22 has a base 28 with a concave interior surface 30 that defines a ball rest. A pair of sidewalls 32, 34 diverge from base 28, and are interconnected by an arcuate lip 36 at the ends thereof remote from base 28. Sidewalls 32, 34 are of diverging hourglass-like construction in plan view (FIGS. 1 and 4), being interiorly convex for about one-half of their lengths adjacent to base 28, and interiorly concave for about one-half of their lengths adjacent to lip 36. A series of apertures 38 is disposed entirely around frame 22 along a back side thereof for securing net 24 to frame 22. A socket 40 exteriorly projects from frame base 28 for receiving handle 26 (FIGS. 1-2 and 7) and securing head 22 to handle 26 by means of a screw 41 (FIG. 7) or other suitable means. Handle 26 and socket 40 thus define a handle/head axis 42

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(FIGS. 4, 6, 7 and 10). In the illustrated embodiment of the invention, axis 42 defines the lateral centerline and the lateral axis of symmetry between the opposing sides of the head, which is to say that sidewalls 32, 34 are mirror images of each other, as are the laterally opposed portions of lip 36 and base 28. A pair of ribs 44 integrally extend from associated sidewalls 32, 34 to the end of socket 40 remote from base 28 for strengthening the socket/frame interconnection.

The front side edge 46 of that portion of base 28 immediately adjacent to socket 40 defines a plane 48 (FIG. 6) that is offset from but parallel to handle/head axis 42. As noted above, lacrosse handles of conventional construction typically have all or a major portion of frame front side edge 46 disposed in plane 48. However, contrary to such conventional constructions, head 22 of the present invention incorporates both a front side edge 46 and a back side edge 50 that curve between base 28 and lip 36 first away from plane 48 in the direction of back side edge 50, and then back toward plane 48. Front side edge 46 crosses plane 48 at 56, and then reverses curvature toward lip 36. Back edge 50 is convex (as viewed in FIG. 6) until blending with lip 36. Thus, edges 46, 50 taper toward each other and merge into lip 36. Both sidewalls 32, 34 are preferably of uniform thickness 52 for at least one-half, and preferably about three-quarters, of their respective lengths. Thickness 52 preferably is not more than two inches, as required by applicable NCAA specifications. In the region of such uniform thickness 52, front side edges 46 of sidewalls 32, 34 have a radius of curvature 54 (FIG. 6) of about 9.86 inches. After front side edge 46 crosses plane 48 at about point 56 (FIG. 6), front side edge 46 has a reverse radius of curvature 58 of about 5.05 inches. From about such crossing of front side edge 46 of plane 48 at point 56, thickness of sidewalls 32, 34 decreases uniformly to a minimum thickness at lip 36.

At lip 36 (FIGS. 6 and 10) there are defined a front lip outside surface 60, a back lip outside surface 62 at an angle to surface 60, and an inside lip surface 64 that is smooth and continuous from front to back and side to side of lip 36. As shown in FIG. 10, surfaces 60, 62 define at the centerline of the head a ground contact plane 80. This plane 80 is the plane of contact of lip 36 with the ground (assuming that the ground is flat) when the lip is held flat against the ground to scoop a ball. In accordance with this feature of the invention, the angle 82 (FIG. 10) between plane 80 and head/handle axis 42, and thus the angle of the handle to the ground during scooping, is at least 40°, but not more than 65°. The presently preferred angle 82 is 45°. The angle of surface 60 with respect to axis 42 in the preferred embodiment of the invention is around 60°, and the angle of surface 62 with respect to axis 42 is around 45°. These surfaces are angled with respect to each other to provide a slightly thickened exterior rib around the lip for added strength. The angle of surface 64 with respect to axis 42 is at least 40°, and preferably about 47°. The inside edge of lip 36 has a uniform radius of curvature 66 (FIG. 4) of about 5.7 inches in the preferred embodiment of the invention, and the outside edge of lip 36 has a uniform radius of curvature 68 of about 4.2 inches.

Base 28 of frame 24 has a concave shoulder 70 at the back side thereof, which is recessed with respect to base ball-rest surface 30. As best seen in FIG. 6, net attachment apertures 38 at base 28 are disposed in recessed shoulder 70. In this way the net strings and knots are recessed below surface 30, and are protected from abutment and abrasion by the lacrosse balls. Surface 30 is at a 1° back angle 72 (FIG. 7) with respect to perpendicular to axis 42, which is to say that

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